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AUTHOR David, Jane L.
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ABSTRACT

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is the most comprehensive reform legislation nationally, bringing substantial change to all levels of the educational system. A group of researchers who have spent time in schools in Kentucky and policy analysts knowledgeable about Kentucky and other state education reform efforts convened in October 1992 to share their insights on the progress of systemic education reform in Kentucky. This report presents the results of that meeting. Impacts from KERA's implementation that are immediately visible inside districts, schools, and classrooms are: (1) state and local funding increased by almost 25 percent; (2) a very different philosophy of curriculum and instruction for primary students shifted from age-based to developmentally appropriate curricula; (3) well over one-third of Kentucky's schools have school-based decisionmaking councils; (4) major progress has been made in developing and administering the first stage of a dramatically different assessment system; (5) extra educational and social services are available at the school site for large numbers of children and their families; and (6) the Kentucky Department of Education has been fundamentally reorganized and the Office of Education Accountability has been established to monitor KERA's implementation and allegations of wrongdoing. Professional development is essential for successful implementation. Full implementation raises five challenges: expanding capacities at all levels; appropriately timing the implementation steps; avoiding recreation of bureaucracy; sustaining educators and public support; and providing feedback mechanisms for midcourse adjustments without sacrificing coherence. KERA is unique in its comprehensiveness and provides a model experiment in creating and testing performance-based educational systems. Three appendices include highlights of the Kentucky Reform Act; a list of meeting participants; and executive summaries of research reports. (TEJ)

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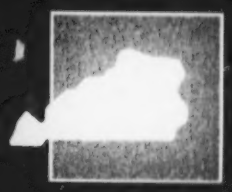

Redesigning an Education System: Early Observations from Kentucky

National Governors' Association

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT
TOUGH CHOICES FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

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STRATEGIC INVESTMENT:
TOUGH CHOICES FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

by Jane L. David

Education Policy Studies
Center for Policy Research

National Governors' Association

The National Governors' Association (NGA), founded in 1908, is the instrument through which the nation's Governors collectively influence the development and implementation of national policy and apply creative leadership to state issues. The Education Policy Studies program is part of the Center for Policy Research, the research and development arm of NGA. Education Policy Studies staff work closely with other education, political, and business groups as well as policymakers in every state to study education reform. Through publications, conferences, and technical assistance, education program staff work to assist states as they implement education reforms.

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, created in 1980, is a group of concerned private Kentucky citizens committed to the improvement of education for people of all ages. During the committee's first decade, its members focused on improving education via legislative reform. That goal was reached with the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, hailed as the most comprehensive school reform legislation in the nation. In 1990 the committee developed a six-year plan to support the successful implementation of state education reform. This plan includes provisions for evaluating and reporting the progress of KERA, both in the state and nationwide; and, enlisting, training and supporting parents and citizens who are willing to monitor and encourage the implementation of education reform in Kentucky.

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Foreword

Governor Roy Romer, Colorado
Chair, National Governors' Association

Improving our educational system is essential to the economic prosperity of this country. We must ensure that our students have the skills and knowledge to compete in a world economy and actively participate in a democracy. A society that does not value the education of its citizens cannot preserve its future.

For this reason, the nation's Governors have made a commitment to achieve the national education goals. The Governors realize that reaching the goals requires redesigning our public education system and the other human resource development systems that support it—our colleges and universities, businesses, and health and social service agencies. As the states' chief executive officers, Governors are leading efforts to redesign their education systems and to create the new partnerships necessary to support systemic change and meet the demands of our rapidly changing world.

There is no simple, solution to the problem of redesigning our education system. But, we do know where to start. We must start from the premise that all children can learn at higher levels given a fair opportunity, the right tools, and a productive learning environment. By creating high performance standards that all students are expected to meet, we can begin to shift the other aspects of our education system to support students' attainment of these standards.

We must train educators to prepare students to achieve the new standards and create new assessments that measure when the standards are reached. These changes cannot occur without also aligning other parts of the system to the new standards: curriculum, textbooks, technology, licensing and accreditation. Even our human services support systems must be realigned to ensure that young children come to school ready to learn and that the health and emotional needs of children are being addressed so that they can focus on their education.

While improving education is a national imperative, it remains a state and local responsibility. Elementary, secondary, and higher education constitute the largest single item in state budgets. States establish the framework within which local districts and schools function. For these reasons, responsibility for education reform falls primarily to states. Many states are actively engaged in trying to bring about the necessary changes. Each is challenged by trying to create a new system while at the same time operating under the existing, inadequate system. Each is also challenged to help educators and the public understand what new high standards mean and the ways teaching and learning must change in order for all students to reach those standards.

Kentucky is one of several states leading the way. With the opportunity to create their state education legislation from the ground up, Kentucky is the forerunner in implementing comprehensive reform. Their experiences provide an unprecedented opportunity to learn about the progress and stumbling blocks in the early stages of implementing statewide systemic education reform. To benefit from their experience,

the National Governors' Association joined forces with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, an organization of Kentucky citizens committed to the improvement of education. Together, they convened a group of leading researchers and policy analysts in October 1992, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to share their insights on the progress of systemic education reform in Kentucky.

This meeting was the first of its kind. It was designed to bring together researchers who have spent time in schools in Kentucky with policy analysts knowledgeable about Kentucky and other state education reform efforts. Their charge was to identify issues and early lessons in the implementation of comprehensive statewide education reform that could be shared with others contemplating similar reform efforts. This report presents the results of that meeting. The themes that emerged—including the importance of creating the capacity of educators to carry out new roles, establishing realistic expectations for reform, and developing understanding and support for the new performance standards—are those that must be considered as we continue to work together to improve the public schools across the country.

Foreword

Robert F. Sexton, Executive Director
The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Lexington, Kentucky

Those working to implement the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), now in the third year of its six-year implementation, understand that making such comprehensive changes work in Kentucky schools is the toughest job they will ever attempt.

School reform as dramatic as this requires vast changes in teaching and learning, in how schools are structured, and in how schools and the community interact. Successful school reform also requires profound social and political changes. Civic business must be conducted well and local citizens must take responsibility for the broad education of all the community's children. Families must be committed to school excellence. School reform requires democratic deliberation and community interaction in which citizens reach judgments through informed discussion, and conduct themselves with tolerance and mutual respect.

Meanwhile, citizens are impatient for results and proof that their tax investment is paying off. Changes, however, take time to implement and quantifiable results are slow to emerge, even under ideal conditions. Politicians and voters grow impatient quickly. The political clock runs faster than the reform implementation clock.

For these reasons, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, an organization of citizen volunteers committed to vastly improved Kentucky schools, joined with the National Governors' Association in this project to track KERA's progress. We believe that it is important to inform the public of interim results and to make mid-course adjustments if they are needed.

Fortunately, much research is already underway, even in the early stages of reform. The information in this report, a snapshot of progress to date, emerges from those who are conducting this research and shared their preliminary observations with one another. The cumulative results of these discussions are reported in this paper. We hope it proves useful to those within Kentucky who are responsible for reform and to those across the nation who are watching what happens in Kentucky's schools.

1. Introduction

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is the most comprehensive education reform legislation in the nation. Its comprehensiveness is a direct result of the 1989 Kentucky Supreme Court decision that found the previous system of common schools unconstitutional. Consequently, Kentucky lawmakers had an unprecedented opportunity to design a new education system from the ground up. KERA's unusually broad scope and interconnected performance-based structure, coupled with substantial increases in funding, make it unique in the history of education reform.[1]

As KERA's policies are translated into practice, it has attracted the attention of education reformers nationwide, even those who question some of its premises and mandates. Is KERA unfolding as envisioned? Are there early observations that can inform Kentucky and other states that are struggling to create and implement systemic education reform, whether or not they pursue a legislative approach?

To begin to answer these questions the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence,[2] supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, brought together a group of researchers, consultants, and policy analysts to pool their knowledge and insights about the early stages of KERA's implementation. During the day-and-a-half meeting, twenty-eight people shared their preliminary observations on Kentucky and their experiences in other states, and then discussed these findings in the context of past and current reform efforts across the nation.[3]

This paper summarizes the remarkably consistent conclusions of that conversation and incorporates information from published reports and reactions from key leaders in Kentucky.[4] KERA clearly has had a major impact across the state in the brief two and one-half years since it was enacted. A tremendous amount of activity has occurred in a very short period—far more than skeptical outside observers anticipated. Changes are visible at all levels of the education system and there is continuing strong and broad public support for the reforms. The major challenges are created by KERA's main strength—its comprehensive, interconnected nature. Since everything cannot happen at once, how is it possible to get all of the pieces into place and build the capacity to implement KERA? How much harder will this task become if the projected budget shortfall for the next biennium materializes?

2. Strides in Implementation

Given the complex interconnected structure of systemic reform, KERA's implementation poses enormous challenges to those inside and outside the education system. Nevertheless, its impact is immediately visible inside districts, schools, and classrooms across the state.

- Funding has increased substantially and is more equitably distributed. From July 1990 to July 1992, state and local funding both increased by almost 25 percent and the gap between the richest and poorest districts was reduced by one-third.
- All elementary schools are attempting to shift to an ungraded primary program (kindergarten through third grade). This represents a very different philosophy of curriculum and instruction for primary students—one that focuses on developmentally appropriate rather than age-based learning opportunities.
- Well over one-third of Kentucky's schools have school-based decisionmaking councils composed of three elected teachers, two elected parents and the site administrator. The councils have the potential to significantly shift decisionmaking authority to each school site. Virtually all schools are required to have councils by 1996.
- Major progress has been made in developing and administering the first stage of a dramatically different assessment system. The new system and the rewards and sanctions tied to school performance send a powerful signal about the kinds of changes expected in teaching and learning.
- For the first time, extra educational and social services are available at the school site for large numbers of children and their families, including preschool programs, family resource and youth services centers, and extended school services.
- The Kentucky Department of Education has been fundamentally reorganized under the new office of Commissioner of Education. The Office of Education Accountability has been established under the Legislative Research Commission to monitor KERA's implementation and investigate allegations of wrongdoing such as mismanagement and illegal activity.

Across the state, educators and parents are working very hard to make KERA work. Some criticism, skepticism, and even conflict can be expected as KERA is translated from policy to practice. Yet an overwhelming reservoir of human energy is focused on figuring out what it takes to translate the language of KERA into educational

practices that make sense for Kentucky's children. Educators are often overwhelmed, but they are persevering.

Policymakers and researchers from outside the state watching KERA bring tempered expectations for the reform effort based on a long history of major slippage between policy and its implementation. What accounts for so much progress in light of these expectations?

In contrast to many state reform plans, until now most of KERA's funding has materialized and no major public backlash has occurred following the tax hike to support the initiative. Although minimally involved in the creation of KERA, educators generally seem to support the goals and direction of the reforms. Parent support is strong and there is more involvement in schools through preschool programs, school-based decisionmaking, the family resource centers, and the work of the Prichard Committee. However, these factors also are a product of the context in which KERA was created.

Several unusual features of the context in which KERA was developed and is being implemented have played an important role in its early progress.

- In Kentucky's unique school finance court case, the decision of the state supreme court went well beyond finance to declare the entire system unconstitutional.
- Kentucky's low ranking in nationwide education statistics created a climate in which the need for change was evident.
- The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, with a ten-year track record for focusing attention on improving education and maintaining independence from partisan politics, played a major role in promoting the reforms. The business community also actively supported the initiative.
- The Governor's office provided continuity in its support for KERA despite a change in administration required by Kentucky's one-term limit on the governorship.
- The leadership of Kentucky's state legislature remained the same from the passage of KERA in 1990 through the 1992 biennial session.

Implementation of the reforms has progressed rapidly because the legislature and the Governor elected after KERA's passage made a commitment not to tinker with the law and maintained that commitment through the second biennial legislative session. The Prichard Committee continues to keep a watchful eye on KERA and its implementation by disseminating information, creating local parent support groups, and working with the business community to create and maintain public awareness and support. Specifically, Kentucky's Business Roundtable members[5] and the Prichard Committee created The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, which is composed of fifty-seven representatives of the political, business, education, and civic communities. The partnership launched and continues to support a statewide advertising campaign to promote KERA.

3. Inside School Communities: The Hard Work Begins

A consistent picture of KERA's early impact emerges from those who have spent time talking to teachers, administrators, and community members. The new assessments send a powerful signal to teachers that KERA means major changes in what students know and are able to do. The assessments—even in their nascent form[6]—vividly illustrate a different kind of student outcome than does the list of valued learner outcomes. Teachers also know that curriculum and instruction must change, though most are not clear on what they should do differently.

The potential for school rewards and sanctions certainly contributes to the significance afforded these new measures. Teachers and site administrators wonder how the thresholds (i.e., the amount of improvement the state sets for each school) will be determined. Some are concerned about their school being labeled a "school in crisis," but they are more concerned with meeting the day-to-day demands of KERA and their jobs.

Teachers generally believe that the new assessments are much better than traditional standardized tests; they also believe that current curriculum and instruction do not prepare students for these kinds of tests. They are not clear, however, what curriculum and instruction should look like and how to judge student improvement against these new standards. Parents are less certain that the new assessments are an improvement, especially those with children who have performed successfully on traditional tests. Parents also are concerned about the amount of time the testing consumes.

The significance of the new approach to assessment became even more apparent with the release of the first results. The results showed that roughly 90 percent of the schools will need to make substantial progress over the next twenty years to meet the state standards. The results from the first round of assessments administered in grades four, eight, and twelve in the spring of 1992 were released in fall 1992, reporting percentages by school in four categories: novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished. The first scores reported that roughly 90 percent of the students are in the novice and apprentice categories. It is not yet clear whether the gap between current performance and the high standards will serve as a rallying point for reform.

KERA requires all schools to replace grade-level distinctions in kindergarten through the third grade with an ungraded **primary program** in which students learn at their own pace. In the schools that chose to implement the primary program before it was required, teachers vary considerably in their support for the program's philosophy and in their ability to develop curriculum and teach in desired ways. This suggests it will be even harder for elementary teachers in schools that did not volunteer before 1992-93.

Parents tend to be less accepting of the change; they are uncomfortable since they are accustomed to grade levels and letter grades and do not know what to expect in their absence.

The 1992-93 deadline for implementing the primary program is not realistic for most schools, especially in light of the few opportunities to learn new ways of teaching and developing curriculum. Where progress is evident, teachers have devoted extraordinary amounts of their own time, including summers and weekends, to figuring out what to do. However, most teachers are accustomed to "packaged" ways of meeting new program requirements, not to developing new ways themselves. They will be unable to do so without extra time and opportunities for learning. Some teachers question the appropriateness of including kindergarteners, partly because of age and social development and partly because of logistical problems posed by half-day kindergarten classes.

Schools throughout the state are forming **school-based decisionmaking** councils that meet regularly. Councils are required to have three elected teachers, two elected parents, and the site administrator, all of whom serve one-year terms. They have the authority to make certain decisions that directly affect their school's program. The actual limits of their authority, especially vis-a-vis their local school board, currently are being tested. Councils feel empowered by their ability to hire principals when vacancies occur, but they are slow to tackle issues relating to curriculum and instruction. In fact, there may be little relationship between the existence of a school council and improvements in curriculum and classroom instruction.

Most councils operate according to the principal's style and usually have a number of committees and subcommittees. Involvement in the council is time consuming and often is perceived as risky since decisions can negatively affect one's peers. Some schools, particularly those with pre-existing decisionmaking bodies and larger schools, would like more flexibility in council membership. Most schools believe that terms should be longer so that groups can learn to work together. They question whether the council always should be headed by the principal. Parents, especially those in schools with a history of adversarial relations, are less certain about extending the term of council members. They fear a new power base will be created if the same teachers serve for a number of years.

Professional development, to be funded at the level of $16 to $17 per student in 1992-93, is fundamental to the successful implementation of KERA. Most teachers and administrators are open to change but lack the knowledge and skills—and the time and opportunity to acquire them—to meet the increased demands and responsibilities of their jobs under KERA. Principals and superintendents are key to successful school-based reform but have little background in leading and supporting the processes and goals of KERA. Similarly, in their professional training or training on the job, teachers have little experience in designing challenging curriculum and instruction and figuring out how to track student progress on an ongoing basis.

Existing opportunities for professional development are limited in number and, more critically, in their structure. Most university faculty and consultants who are the primary providers of professional development operate under a traditional workshop mode and training paradigm inappropriate to many of the demands of KERA. These

new demands require a different model of adult learning—one that has built-in opportunities to participate in authentic tasks, observe best practices, and work collaboratively with peers and experts.

The regional service centers are intended to meet some of these needs, but there is widespread concern about the capacity of these centers to meet the demand, both in terms of numbers and requisite skills. The eight centers, six of which are located at institutions of higher education, are responsible for coordinating the professional development of the employees of the districts they serve by brokering services already available through existing cooperatives and consortia, or by directly providing services otherwise unavailable. Center staff are responsible for providing technical assistance to districts that request help in the planning and implementation of KERA, in leadership development, and in developing their capacity for change. However, they are staffed at a ratio of one staff member for every 1000 teachers.

In partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education, universities also are responsible for training "distinguished" educators to help schools in crisis (i.e., schools failing to meet their improvement threshold). There is little reason to expect that the institutions that have trained teachers and administrators in the old ways can provide the dramatically different kinds of professional development needed to implement KERA.

The **family resource and youth services centers** have been established in more than 200 schools and communities. KERA funds their efforts to coordinate services but does not provide them. Schools with previous experience in working collaboratively with other service providers are better able to create cooperative relationships. The center coordinator is key to the success of the centers. It is a complex job that requires exceptional skills and energy. This includes the ability to be an advocate for students and families and to obtain their trust and that of school staff and service providers.

The centers provide a new and positive way for families to become involved in their schools. However, there is concern that the required service components, such as after-school care and training for child care workers, may constrain local discretion in allocating limited resources. And, like the primary program, it is anticipated that the challenge will be much more difficult for those less ready schools that did not choose to be early implementers.

Grassroots understanding of KERA lags behind that of state leaders and experts. Roughly one-third of the population has heard of KERA and one-third of those know something about it; these figures have not changed over the last two years. Those familiar with KERA tend to know only one piece—for example the primary program or the family resource center. Support is strongest for school-based decisionmaking and accountability and weakest for the new assessment and the primary program, reinforcing the finding that few people see KERA as an interconnected whole. Teachers are the public's main source of information about KERA. This suggests that their support is critical to gaining widespread public acceptance for the reforms.

4. Early Observations: Issues for Contemplation

These findings represent interim results of preliminary research studies and they are based on the early stages of KERA's implementation. Consequently, they do not provide a basis for drawing definitive conclusions about KERA. However, they do suggest the next set of hurdles faced by those implementing KERA. They also provide useful guidance for those in other states creating their own versions of systemic reform.

KERA carries with it the same challenges as any education reform policy: how to transform legislative language and intent into actual changes in classroom practice. There is always enormous slippage between the rhetoric of policy and its impact on practice as policies are incorporated into existing habits and ways of operating. Because it is comprehensive and linked and represents a long-term commitment, KERA potentially has much more leverage to change practice than have typical reform policies. Yet there are still major hurdles, stemming in part from the limits of any policy to change practice and in part from the complexity and interrelatedness of KERA's many facets.

Five challenges in particular are listed here and discussed below. Like KERA's components, these challenges are interrelated in multiple ways. The discussion is in the context of KERA's components, but the challenges apply to any state systemic reform effort. With KERA well underway, the state must focus on next steps. In addition, other states can benefit from Kentucky's early experiences. Kentucky, and other states learning from Kentucky, must endeavor to meet the challenges that follow.

- Create the capacity at all levels of the system to carry out the new roles and responsibilities demanded by KERA and redefine professional development in ways that accomplish this.
- Ensure that the components of KERA are implemented in a sequence that makes sense, since all of the pieces cannot be implemented simultaneously.
- Avoid the temptation to recreate bureaucratic ways of operating at the state level and encourage the same in schools and districts. Create an appropriate balance between direction from the top and discretion at the bottom.
- Create realistic expectations for implementation and results, and build support among educators and the public.
- Develop mechanisms that encourage ongoing feedback about progress and barriers, and make needed adjustments without compromising the integrity and intent of the legislation.

Capacity Building

KERA asks teachers, administrators, parents, and students to take on very different roles and responsibilities in their schools. KERA's goal to dramatically increase the performance of all students creates a tremendous challenge to build the capacity of people at all levels of the system to carry out these new roles and responsibilities.

Implementing systemic reform requires adults to learn to do their jobs differently, yet there are few opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn. Teachers need the time and opportunities to learn new ways of teaching, how to develop curriculum and activities that actively engage students, and new ways of gauging individual progress. Administrators need a new vision of leadership that includes effective teamwork and the ability to inspire the ongoing development of teachers. These are much more complex and difficult ways of teaching and leading that are not amenable to the packaged solutions offered by existing vendors or the traditional workshop model of training.

This capacity building challenge in turn requires rethinking and redefining how institutions of higher education prepare teachers and administrators for their jobs, and how professional development can provide the kind of ongoing support that is needed. It also requires figuring out how to build time for professional development into the job. Similarly, the new roles KERA asks of parents and community members require a much greater knowledge base, yet opportunities for such learning are rare.

Timing and Sequencing

Ideally, all the components of KERA should be put into place simultaneously. In reality this is impossible in Kentucky or elsewhere. Different parts of the law take different amounts of time to develop and implement, and unexpected delays and resource limits are facts of life. The ultimate challenge of KERA—as a comprehensive performance-based system—is to ensure that the messages about expected changes and the supports to make the necessary changes in practice are in place before judgments about progress and KERA's ultimate success are made.

Assuming that there are realistic timelines for results that do not exceed political patience—a major challenge in itself—there still are tough choices about which pieces should come first. Is the development of new assessments and high standards the critical first step? Or, should the goals be developed first? Should the goals be developed through a time-consuming participatory process or through a small representative group that then must sell them to the larger audience? Can elementary teachers design their primary programs before knowing the exit criteria for third grade and before the real authority of school councils has been determined? Can schools be expected to improve student performance before curriculum frameworks, new forms of professional development, and intensive technical assistance are in place?

Issues of sequence and timing are further complicated by the backdrop of pre-existing signals and regulations that direct and constrain practice, particularly those stemming from federal categorical programs. Although the signals calling for a new approach to assessment are strong, most districts still rely heavily on standardized tests because they are the basis for eligibility and evaluation for many programs. Can a

performance-based system be implemented in a context of contradictory signals about expectations?

Recreating Bureaucracy

As a performance-based system, KERA seeks a new balance between the top (state) and the bottom (schools). The tendency for those at the bottom is to ask for direction and clarity, and the tendency of those at the top is to provide it. Left alone, bureaucracies tend to reinvent themselves, preserving the roles to which everyone is accustomed. The challenge for the system's higher levels is to refrain from micromanaging the lower levels.

However, it is much easier to articulate the goal of balancing top-down control with bottom-up authority and discretion than to determine what this means in practice. For example, should the state mandate: an ungraded primary program, the composition of school councils, the amount of improvement required of each school, or the services to be provided by the family resource centers? Moreover, is the message of trust and authority delegated to schools undermined by inspection and prescription by the state?

The resolution of these questions does not lie in simple yes/no, either/or choices. These questions represent a larger set of issues about how best to combine guidance, pressure, and structure from the top with discretion, responsibility, and invention at the bottom. Their resolution requires a very different mindset at the state and district levels including a shift from setting specifications, regulations, and requirements (rowing) to setting goals and offering alternative structures and models for reaching them (steering). Mechanisms for ongoing dialogue about the meaning of the goals and the connections of all parts of a performance-based system become the backdrop for resolving specific questions of control. These mechanisms will replace bureaucratic rulemaking and clarification.

Maintaining Broad Support

Maintaining support for systemic reform over the long term requires ongoing attention to creating ownership among educators and to educating and engaging the public. Ensuring that expectations are realistic is a major part of sustaining support. If thresholds for schools are not attainable, if timelines for implementation are unrealistic, and if expectations for assistance and rewards are not realized, the chances are high that public and educator support will wane. Setting high standards is important. Yet creating realistic timelines for their attainment is equally critical, particularly since those directly affected are not involved in setting the thresholds.

KERA is complicated and so, too, are the new ways of assessing students. It is hardly surprising that only a small fraction of the public understands more than one piece of the reform. Yet it is perhaps less important that the public understand all the interconnections of systemic reform and more important that both educators and the public understand the philosophy of teaching and learning that underlies KERA. For without this understanding, it is unlikely that school and community ownership will grow and persist long enough for the very difficult changes to occur inside classrooms.

The components of KERA that provide new opportunities for parents to become more involved in their children's schools are a starting point for building this ownership.

Continuous Learning and Adaptation

It is not possible to predict what will happen with legislation as groundbreaking, interrelated, and far-reaching as KERA. Stakeholders inside and outside the education system need ways to maintain continuous learning as KERA unfolds. All parties must expect to learn from experience, to communicate new knowledge, and to make the necessary adaptations and changes as they go along. The challenge is to maintain the flow of information and communication in ways that promote problemsolving without compromising its integrity and coherence.

It is especially important for state leaders to have information sources that capture the struggles to change inside schools. State policymakers also need data on results and ongoing descriptive information that identifies and explains both successful change and barriers to improvement. This information is essential to making wise decisions about allocating resources and to maintaining the optimal balance between top-down and bottom-up control.

States need mechanisms for learning and the ability to make reasonable mid-course adjustments that do not fundamentally change the coherence of comprehensive reform. A balance must be found between reluctance to tamper with KERA and the need for ongoing modifications as new knowledge is gleaned from local experience.

5. Beyond Kentucky

The key features of KERA that distinguish it from other education reform efforts are its comprehensiveness and interconnectedness. Yet creating this kind of initiative requires the right context including a shared perception of the need for reform and the ability to build a new system from the ground up. Such a legislative package cannot be layered on top of decades of education statute; its integrity rests on the legislature's ability to start from scratch. If state legislatures do not have this luxury, they must be willing to undo existing statute. This suggests that a legislative approach to comprehensive systemic reform may be much more difficult in states without a court decision like Kentucky's. Nevertheless, states such as Vermont illustrate that there are nonlegislative approaches to comprehensive reform that can bring about major systemic reform.

Whatever the impetus for reform its success requires maintaining a long-term commitment, including resources. Implementing systemic reform takes longer than the typical terms of office of elected officials. Kentucky's commitment to the integrity of KERA has been supported by the existence of the Prichard Committee and the business partnership. External organizations, such as the Prichard Committee in Kentucky or the Business-Education Subcommittee in South Carolina, may be essential for long-term reform.

KERA's implementation offers an extraordinary laboratory for learning what is involved in creating and testing a performance-based education system. Lessons are emerging that go well beyond education to the very heart of democracy in schools and communities. Kentucky's demographics, political history, timing, and court decision make KERA's birth and early nurturing unique. It is unlikely that any other state can duplicate the exact conditions and therefore the details of KERA. Nevertheless, there are powerful messages coming from Kentucky's experience in creating and launching KERA—messages that speak to reformers across the nation.

Endnotes

1. Appendix 1 summarizes the major components of KERA.
2. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is an organization of Kentucky citizens committed to the improvement of education for people of all ages.
3. Appendix 2 lists the participants.
4. Appendix 3 contains summaries of research reports.
5. Kentucky's Business Roundtable members are United Parcel Service, Inc., Ashland Oil, Inc., and Humana Inc.
6. The assessments include performance tasks, portfolios, and a "transitional" test containing multiple-choice and open-ended items. Over time, as the tasks and portfolios are more fully developed, the transitional test assumes less significance in the overall score.

About the Author

Jane L. David is director of the Bay Area Research Group in Palo Alto, California. Her research and consulting activities focus on the connections between educational policy and how schools change. She is currently working on a study of barriers to restructuring education systems with the National Governors' Association. Dr. David continues to study school-based decisionmaking for the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky and the role of technology and teacher development in systemic reform for Apple Computer, Inc.

Appendix 1:
Highlights of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)

Overview of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990

In 1985, sixty-six property-poor Kentucky school districts filed a lawsuit against the governor, legislature, superintendent of public schools, and the state school board, alleging that state school funding was inadequate and inequitable. On June 9, 1989, the Kentucky Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the Franklin Circuit Court known as the Corns Ruling. This decision declared Kentucky's *entire system* of common schools to be unconstitutional on the basis of the Kentucky Constitution, Section 183. The Court directed the Kentucky General Assembly to re-create a "substantially uniform" system of schools that provides each child with an equal opportunity to have an adequate education. On April 11, 1990, the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 was signed into law. Each part of the law fits with the others in a comprehensive framework. The key provisions are listed below.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 establishes **student performance outcomes for all students**, and requires schools to help all students to successfully meet them. This is the key provision of the legislation, and it is the basis for all other provisions.

To ensure students acquire the desired outcomes, **the law holds educators accountable**. Significant consequences, including monetary rewards and the possibility of dismissal, are established for educators.

New and different **student performance assessments** are being created to determine if students are successful. These new assessments are performance-based; that is, they measure students' actual abilities to use the knowledge and skills they have gained rather than their ability to choose one of four possible answers in a paper and pencil test.

Since educators face significant consequences, they are given the authority in **school-based decision making** to determine how to help students learn. Parents are included on the school councils, since they also have an important stake in whether schools are successful.

Professional development funds have been increased to help teachers prepare for the changes in the law and learn how to better help students learn.

Several other programs have been established to support the work of educators to help students learn.

Preschool Programs offer four-year-old children at risk of educational failure an opportunity to become better prepared for school. Parents are an important part of this program.

The **Primary School Program** replaces grades kindergarten through three to allow students to progress at their own pace without the stigma of failure. Students will move into fourth grade when they have mastered the skills they need to be successful in fourth grade.

Extended School Services provides extra instructional time for those students who need more time to meet specific performance goals. This help may be provided before school, after school, weekends, or during the summer.

Technology will be used to help students learn and connect teachers and students to other resources in order to stimulate and improve learning. It also will help collect information about school districts across the state.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers provide students with access to needed services in schools where 20 percent or more students are on the free lunch program. Students bring their family, social, emotional, economic, and child care needs to school Centers will help meet the nonacademic needs of students and allow teachers and principals to focus on instruction.

New laws governing schools were enacted to encourage decision making based on helping students meet performance goals.

Finally, the new law provided more money to schools in order to help students learn. **Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK)** is the new funding formula that ensures students a more equal opportunity for a high-quality education no matter where they live.

All components of the **Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990** are connected to each other. There are many other parts of this new law that are too numerous to mention. It will take several years to fully implement all of these programs and even longer to see major results.

Many states in this country have enacted laws that include parts of these components, but Kentucky is the first state to put such a comprehensive law in place. People across the country are paying attention to what happens in Kentucky. Teachers, school administrators, school board members, school council members, parents, students, and the general public must work together to implement these laws so that children have better opportunities to be educated and become contributing members of society.

Appendix 2:
Meeting Participants

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA): A Discussion on Systemic Educational Reform

Meeting Participants

Jacob Adams
Vanderbilt University
Tennessee

Tony Cipollone
The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Inc.
Connecticut

Pam Coe
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
West Virginia

Michael Cohen
National Alliance for Restructuring Education
Washington, D.C.

Jane David
Bay Area Research Group
California

Karin Egan
Carnegie Corporation
New York

Jack D. Foster
Center for Strategic Policy Studies
Kentucky

Susan Fuhrman
Consortium for Policy Research in Education
New Jersey

Kati Haycock
American Association for Higher Education
Washington, D.C.

David Hornbeck
Hornbeck and Associates
Maryland

Thomas James
Brown University
Rhode Island

Steve Kay
Roberts and Kay
Kentucky

Pam Lutz
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
West Virginia

C. Kent McGuire
Lilly Endowment, Inc.
Indiana

Allan Odden
Consortium for Policy Research in Education
Finance Center
California

Terry Peterson
South Carolina Business Education Committee
South Carolina

James Raths
University of Delaware
Delaware

Rona Roberts
Roberts and Kay
Kentucky

Phillip W. Roeder
University of Kentucky
Kentucky

Phillip Schlechty
Center for Leadership in School Reform
Kentucky

Patrick M. Shields
SRI International
California

Claire Smrekar
Vanderbilt University
Tennessee

NGA Staff

Paul Goren

Susan Traiman

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence Staff

Cindy Heine

Bev Raimondo

Robert Sexton

Carolyn Snyder

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Appendix 3:
Executive Summaries of Research Reports

Special Feature: KERA Through the Eyes of Teachers

Pam Coe, Patty Kannapel
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Executive Summary from Notes from the Field: Education Reform in Kentucky, September 1992

Major Findings

This issue of "Notes from the Field" shares the findings of teacher focus group discussions in each of the four school districts participating in this study. These discussions yield the following generalizations about current teacher views on KERA:

- Teachers are excited about the new instructional strategies and increased teacher professionalism associated with KERA.
- Teachers are overwhelmed by their increased workloads as they attempt to implement the law.
- Teachers are frustrated by inconsistent training and information on portfolio assessment; reactions to the interim assessment program are extremely mixed.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about increased professional development opportunities since the passage of KERA.
- Enthusiasm for the nongraded primary program is high, but teachers believe they are being asked to implement the program too quickly.
- School-based decisionmaking (SBDM) is viewed as positive by teachers involved in its implementation, but teachers see a need for greater parent and teacher involvement in SBDM.
- The extended school services program for students who need extra time to acquire skills is viewed as a positive outcome of KERA, but teachers fear funding cuts and increased guidelines will cripple the program.
- Family resources and youth services centers are also viewed as positive, but some teachers are uncomfortable with the increased responsibility schools are being asked to assume over students' lives.
- Although the instructional funds allocated to schools are seen as extremely helpful in implementing KERA, teachers in two districts complain that the overall funding level is inadequate.
- Reorganization of the state department of education has created problems for local educators in obtaining information and assistance.
- The school principal is pivotal in the successful implementation of KERA.

Suggestions for the Legislature

When asked what suggestions they would offer the legislature about KERA, teachers in all groups offered four suggestions:

- slow implementation of the assessment and primary programs so teachers will have time to make the new programs work;
- compensate teachers for the increased workload associated with KERA by increasing planning and training time during the regular school day or by paying for overtime;
- stick with KERA long enough to let it work; and
- fully fund KERA.

The Status of Primary School Reform in Kentucky and Its Implications

James Raths, Lilian Katz, and John Fanning

Executive Summary, July 1992

Introduction

Three educational consultants with extensive public school and university backgrounds visited fourteen public school settings in Kentucky during the late spring of 1992 to assess aspects of the status of the primary school reform as mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Sites were selected on the basis of geography, demographics, and progress toward implementation of the reforms. Although the schools were not selected statistically to represent all schools in the State of Kentucky, the consultants had a sense that they were able to meet with teachers and administrators who, if not representative knew other teachers and other schools sufficiently well to inform the project of what was happening in Kentucky primary classrooms. A more complete accounting of the procedures used in the study is found in the body of the final report.

Principal Findings

In all the schools we visited, many steps have already been taken to implement the mandates. Some schools opted to wait to install the multi-age grouping practices until later—concentrating first on cooperative learning, developmentally appropriate practices, authentic assessment, and the engagement of parents. Others changed grouping patterns first, and let the other attributes of a reformed primary program come later. All of the faculty and principals were optimistic they would be in full compliance, as they understood it, by the deadline.

Many parents have reacted to the KERA mandates by assuming that it is really not their business—but it is the business of the schools and the school leaders. Parents said or reported of others saying: "They [teachers, principals, supervisors, superintendents] know what is best for my child, and if they tell me that the new primary program is an improvement, then I'm for it." Some parents expressed concerns about the new grading procedures—especially the absence of letter grades; and others wondered about the high stakes testing that is required for exit from the primary school. Will the new mandates, which encourages authentic assessment, cooperative learning, and developmentally appropriate practices and other wholesome attributes of a primary school program, prepare their children for the end-of-year tests in third grade?

Teachers, on the other hand, were more mixed in their views. Of course, we met a number of enthusiasts, veterans as it were from the open-education movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They embraced the reforms with open arms. A second group of teachers, who for years have been celebrated as expert and excellent in their craft, held natural concerns about how their teaching might be re-evaluated under the new mandates. Others who felt successful in traditional schools were taking an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude. There seemed to be some concern that in the new primary program, with the new attributes, and the new guidelines, they may be

perceived as "less excellent" as teachers than they are right now under the current system. They are, as a group, moving to accept the new mandates, but with a cynicism bordering on a "this too shall pass" mentality. Finally there are some teachers who believe deeply that the reforms are a mistake. They express concern that the non-graded idea failed in Kentucky twenty years ago, and they can't see any reason why it won't fail again. They express concern that the teaching profession is once again about to face a backlash from angry taxpayers and voters if the test scores suffer under the new mandates. Membership in these four groups is not constant, and teachers seem to move from one to the other depending on the vagaries of the school day, the school week, or the usual ups-and-downs of professional life. We were unable to estimate what proportion of Kentucky teachers fall into each group, but there was some indication that active "upper grade teachers," seeing the glacier of reform accelerating and moving toward them as well, are providing some solace and support to those who find themselves now in the hard core of resistance.

Teachers seem to agree that progress toward reform in the primary school was accounted for mostly by the enthusiasm and dedication of classroom teachers, who gave up their own time and often their own money to make the mandates work as well as their authors had hoped—and in some places even better. It was clear that leadership also played a key role. In some schools, principals were instrumental in convening teacher and parent groups, sending teachers to professional meetings, and scheduling weekend and summer workshops (for no extra pay) so that teachers would have an opportunity to meet, work, and develop some of the key ingredients of the mandates. In short, it was freedom and opportunity that seemed to do the trick.

Many teachers reported being hindered by a lack of time. Efforts on their part to give more time—in the evening and on weekends and during the summer—for no salary led to sometimes confrontations with husbands who thought teachers should worry as much about their own children at home as they worry about their children at school. Also, numerous teachers expressed a need for more training. The teachers seemed to have little sense about how to determine if a given activity were developmentally appropriate; about whether or not a given assessment procedure was truly authentic; or how important it was to defer to a minority of complaining parents about the new reporting procedures. Teachers claimed an interest in learning more about these topics and related ideas.

Across the State and in all schools, teachers found the prospect of including the kindergarten children in the primary school concept to be problematic. There are both logistical and theoretical aspects to their concerns. Most kindergartens in Kentucky are half-day. No plan has yet been developed to engage kindergartners who come and go throughout the day into the on-going class group. Second, since kindergartners for the most part are not socialized to school norms, are unable to work alone or contribute effectively to the work of others, they represent a serious impediment to the learning of older pupils in the group.

Recommendations

The schools we visited have made tremendous progress in the successful implementation of the primary school initiative. As might be expected, the progress toward implementing the KERA mandates represents a broken front. Some schools have made

significant and dramatic progress, and for others the progress was barely discernible. As a group, the teachers and principals are supportive of the philosophy and are working very hard to reach the goals suggested by KERA. The views of parents, as a whole, were represented as less enthusiastic but widely accepting of the changes that are taking place in the primary school. To facilitate and accelerate progress in advancing the KERA goals, the following recommendations are advanced.

1. There is an urgent need to improve the public's understanding of the intent and purposes of the KERA mandates for the primary program. A variety of media approaches should be used, showing the teachers working hard to implement the mandates, showing how children and parents are responding to the various attributes of the primary program, and showing how authentic assessment processes can work.

2. Additional technical training aides via video tape need to be produced showing teachers how to conduct authentic assessments, how to distinguish between developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate practices, how to teach thematically, and other similar concepts. Video tapes are the ideal medium since they can be taken home for viewing, seen during lulls on otherwise overly scheduled [days], and discussed in groups after rewinding portions for closer inspection and review. Incidentally, the videos produced to this end might also be used to advance public understandings of the program, as in recommendation one above.

3. There are aspects about the law and its related rules and regulations that are vague. For example, we heard at least six versions of what the State Department of Education will accept as "kindergarten involvement" in the primary school - from 10 minutes a week to every minute of every day of the week. Each person sharing her view vouched for its accuracy by citing an official of the Kentucky State Department of Education. Another example has to do with the minimum requirements the State Department will impose on schools and on districts. How will compliance with the parent involvement mandate be assessed? How will schools know if they are successfully implementing the mandate for developmentally appropriate practices? It would help to have these policies made public in written form so that everyone has access to them and to their interpretation. The Kentucky State Department of Education has worked hard in this area already, but more needs to be done.

4. In addition, some extant rules and regulations of the Kentucky State Department of Education are seen by teachers to be in conflict with goals of the KERA mandates. For instance, while teachers are working to implement developmentally appropriate practice in the teaching of reading, including the use of trade books and other sources of print material, they tell us there are regulations requiring them to order a specific number of text books for each of their students. (We have subsequently learned that the teachers' perceptions in this instance were inaccurate.) However, we recommend that the Kentucky State Department of Education review all the the promulgated rules and regulations and identify and eliminate or change those which seem to be inconsistent with the intent of the

primary school initiative. Further, it would be important to wonder why it is that some teachers' apparently see the rules and regulations as hindering their efforts.

5. To ensure full implementation of KERA, we recommend that the following resources be made available: provide teachers with released time during the summer with pay to meet together to plan their program; supply teachers the resources to attend workshops and other training sessions and to meet with parents to share ideas and exchange views. In addition, give them classroom aides to help with the nitty-gritty of implementing the program—running dittoes, meeting with children who are falling behind and who need a little extra help, grading papers, and even teaching some small groups. Finally, equip them with materials associated with multi-aged teaching—from computers to software packages to thematic instructional kits. Based on our experiences, it makes sense for the leaders in the State of Kentucky to make an assessment of what these, and other supports will cost the taxpayers, and to work to provide them to teachers as quickly as possible.

6. Certainly, everyone in Kentucky interested in advancing the goals of KERA are concerned about the rumors we reported here about the existence of pockets of resistance to the primary school mandates. While we did not experience much resistance on a first hand bias, teachers and administrators who knew other teachers and other schools told us that large numbers of teachers in the system were working to see to it that the mandates fail. All efforts must be made to support teachers and principals who are working to implement the KERA mandates. A schedule of sanctions might work to encourage reluctant principals and teachers to work toward the goals of the mandates and to indicate the State's seriousness in this matter.

7. From what was heard from the teachers, the universities were almost invisible in providing support to schools interested in meeting the KERA deadlines for implementing the primary school mandates. We emphasize that this is a perception of teachers, and not a statement of fact on our part. We recommend that a serious effort be made to engage appropriate faculty members in the universities in this effort. They might be encouraged to do those things they do best: (1) Develop a rationale for the mandates that can be broadcast to the public; (2) Design evaluations that will provide multiple audiences with the data that will enlist public support for the mandates; (3) Write curriculum materials for use in the schools that represent models of authentic assessment, developmentally appropriate practices, and thematic teaching. In addition, the universities could develop a curriculum bank to store and make accessible to teachers "ideas that worked" in various Kentucky schools. Teachers could assess the contents of the bank through modems in their schools.

8. Although such a move would clearly provide false hope to those who are saying the mandates are "going to go away," it makes sense to back the current deadline up to its previous place in the time line. Teachers feel aggrieved and mistreated by the new accelerated time line, especially those who charted out a plan that accommodated the earlier schedule and which was aborted by the abrupt change.

9. All of our recommendations call for the expenditure of resources—human and material. We suggest that all possible resources within the State—in the business community, in governmental spheres, and in the universities be encouraged to contribute to the effort to ensure that the mandates are implemented in the Kentucky schools.

School-Based Decisionmaking: Observations on Progress

Jane L. David, Bay Area Research Group

A First-Year Report to the Prichard Committee Executive Summary, July 1992

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is designed to create a performance-based education system to increase the learning of all students. The premise of this groundbreaking legislation is that those closest to the students (teachers, parents, and school administrators) have the authority to make school-level policy decisions, in exchange for assuming responsibility for student performance, guided by state goals for student performance. School-based decision making (SBDM) is KERA's vehicle for delegating authority to each school site. Under SBDM, schools form councils of three teachers, two parents, and the school administrator which control many decisions about their instructional program, learning environment, and staffing.

The results from the first of a five-year study of SBDM are based on interviews with Kentucky education officials, visits to seven SBDM schools, central office staff, and to schools not yet participating, and a review of hundred of Kentucky newspaper articles and other documents. As of June 1992, almost 500 of Kentucky's 1366 schools had councils up and running. Most have participated in some type of introductory workshops. In general their agendas have focused on creating operating policies and on issues of discipline, extracurricular activities, and facilities.

Representing a significant shift in authority to schools, SBDM has been a major force in communicating the importance and seriousness of KERA across the state and a critical link between schools and their communities. Teachers especially welcome the opportunity to select their principal and parents welcome the opportunity to have an official voice in school policy making. Not surprisingly, the first year has raised questions, concerns, and conflicts—the very signs of progress in an undertaking as complex and dramatic as KERA.

Implementing all of KERA is a massive undertaking. SBDM, the critical underpinning of KERA, is off to a strong start. But there are major hurdles ahead. Four challenges in particular bear watching and learning from over the next few years: shifting from adversarial relationships to partnerships, focusing school decisionmaking on teaching and learning, ensuring ongoing opportunities for on-the-job professional development, and finding the right balance between state and district requirements on the one hand and school council discretion on the other. As the new roles and relationships become more familiar and the direction of needed changes more clear, SBDM has the potential to play a vital role in transforming Kentucky's schools.

Assessment of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers: A First Year Report to the Prichard Committee, July 1992

Phillip W. Roeder, Department of Political Science, University of Kentucky

Conclusions and Lessons

What are the lessons to be learned from this first-year assessment of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers implemented as part of Kentucky's school reform package?

1. Initiate the implementation process in well-planned stages. Begin with competition for the new Centers limited to only a portion of those schools eligible so that the probability is quite high that the most receptive, knowledgeable, and experienced schools will be first implementers. In other words, begin with schools and communities "ready" for the program. This strategy helps insure that initial enthusiasm and experience can help iron-out inevitable problems and later implementers can benefit from initial successes. More reluctant implementers in later stages of the process can see how Centers work and how they might benefit the program. This strategy depends on the belief of implementers that the program will continue for some reasonable period of time and early implementers won't be left "holding-the-bag" of a successful program with high expectations but facing the loss of state funds needed to maintain the program.

2. Center resources must be sufficient and flexible. This is a fine line and difficult to specify in practice. Resources must be sufficient to hire basic staff and have a place to "do business," however too many resources might lead Councils and Centers to ignore the important mandate to work with existing providers or help develop new service programs in the community. Center Coordinators must get out into the community and advocate on behalf of children and families rather than attempt to provide services in the Centers. At the same time, it is recognized that the problems of children and families are virtually limitless, so sufficient resources are needed to meet basic needs. Resources should be flexible enough so that local areas can respond to unique needs and situations, and responsible "entrepreneurial" behavior is not discouraged.

3. Program success depends on structured or constrained decentralization. Local people must have sufficient autonomy and control to solve their own problems and meet identified community needs, but state officials must set limits and monitor Council and Center activities to guard against abuse or deviations from the basic concept and guiding principals.

4. If Center services are to be mandated from the "top," the service categories should be broad and relate directly to the well-being of children and families with minimal details about how the services are to be delivered. A long, detailed laundry list of mandated services will likely lead to excessive conflict and gaming behavior with subsequent delay, resistance, and possible implementation failure.

5. Center staff, especially the Center Coordinator, should be experienced either in the school system or the community social and health service network. The Center Coordinator must be able to understand and deal effectively with children, especially

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those with problems, as well as parents of those children, community leaders, teachers and principals, and service agency heads. A key to early success in implementation of Centers is commitment and enthusiasm of the Center Coordinator and other staff. Also, creativity and entrepreneurial skills are useful qualities. These should like difficult if not impossible personnel requirements, but the Centers assessed for this report have staff with most if not all these desirable qualities.

6. Center staff must establish close working relationships with teaching staff, including school and district administrators. In successful Centers, Coordinators work with educational staff by being available during lunch periods and other times in teacher lounges, conducting one-on-one consultations, and by attending staff meetings and planning days and training sessions. A pattern of trust and teamwork must be established and maintained between school staff and Center staff. Effective communication patterns must be established and nurtured.

7. To be successful, Centers need support, cooperation, and leadership from the top officials in the school, the district, and the community. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of experience, commitment, and enthusiasm among all involved to make the Centers work. Can a good idea like the Center concept succeed in a bad environment; that is, in a community without much experience or history of agency cooperation and collaboration or in a school with an "autocratic" culture or history of centralized control? It is not likely. Without very effective political and organizational skills and much effort by a Center Coordinator, as well as support and protection from a strong Advisory Council, it would be difficult to change attitudes and perceptions built up over many years in a school or school district. As with education reform in general, some superintendents, principals, and teachers will view Centers as a potential complication or even as a threat to the existing order.

8. Effective evaluation processes should be an integral component of the management and operations of Centers. It is important for the state to work with Council and Center staff to collect sufficient useful data to help evaluate Center performance. In this period of fiscal limits and some public suspicion of government programs, especially "public welfare," it is important that schools and Centers and state officials be able to justify their activities and services and document results of the investment of public funds. All this should be done in a spirit of cooperation with respect for reasonable mandates from the providers of funding and program support.

Some will say these lessons all sound obvious, simplistic, or even trite, but it is important to note how often many of them are ignored or forgotten in designing health, education, and human service programs, especially when the designers are at the "top" of a system and implementers are "below" them. These may be simple lessons, but they are not always easy to accomplish. In the case of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers as part of KERA, Kentucky has learned most of these lessons well.

Although initial implementation of the Centers policy has been relatively successful and problem-free, what about the future? What are some issues that might affect continued success of the program? One important issue involves financial resources. The issue of resource sufficiency and the future of Centers can be reduced to certain numbers and questions. If there are approximately 1000 schools that meet the criterion of 20 percent of students eligible for free lunches and each has a Center averaging

$70,000 per year of funding from KERA, then the program will cost a minimum of $70 million per year. If fewer schools have Centers or schools combine Centers or if the state allocation averages less than $70,000 per year, then yearly costs could be reduced. For example, funding only 500 Centers with the same average allocation would cost $35 million/year. Forecasting program costs is difficult, however full implementation of the Center concept could cost $50 million per year and perhaps more.

Are these numbers that state policy-makers could support, especially as Kentucky faces a very uncertain fiscal future? Would advocates and beneficiaries of the Center concept be able to demonstrate benefits sufficient to make the allocation of such future budgetary resources appear to be a good investment? These are questions that policy-makers, educators, the Interagency Task Force, and others will have to face in the very near future—certainly beginning in the next biennial budget process. Budgetary realities lead to issues of program advocacy.

The question of organizational "ownership" of the Center program (who is the primary advocate for the program—the Commissioner of Education or the Secretary of the CHR or someone else such as a powerful legislator?), and the budgetary numbers suggest two broad options for the future of the program. First, it could be decided that the program is a "pilot" and will not be implemented fully over the next 2-3 years. Assuming the pilot program is given sufficient time to demonstrate effectiveness, would school districts be willing to assume ownership of the program and continue or initiate Councils and Centers using local dollars? If districts see the value of the Centers, and if school based decision-making is working, and if the stated emphasis on local initiative and control is real and continues, then the program would stand or fall on its merits at the district level.

Another alternative is that the CHR could keep the Centers under its organizational "protection." The Centers would continue to be located in the schools, but be funded by the Cabinet with Center Coordinators acting as the local service managers for CHR. However, it may be that CHR is not organized in such a way as to maximize service delivery to families and children. Rather than separate Department of Social Insurance, Health, Employment Services, or Medicaid Services, the Cabinet might be organized around certain client groups such as the elderly or children and families. If all health and social programs for children and families were located in the same department within the Cabinet (a Department of Children and Families within a reorganized Cabinet?), local providers as well as staff in Centers within schools might be better able to coordinate the complex mix of services needed by children and their families. This is a difficult and controversial organizational question and relates to political and fiscal issues including federal requirements as well as requirements of other funding sources.

The issue of budget sufficiency and full implementation relates to need and demand for Council and Center services and programs. Despite the initial enthusiasm and relative success of early adopters, what will occur when less interested and less positive school systems are brought into the program, when more demands for services are placed on existing providers, when more difficult and complex social and health problems must be addressed, and when more independent, territorial and complex social systems must be accessed by the Councils and Centers?

How long and to what degree can Councils and Centers depend on some providers giving "free care?" Needs for services are likely to grow, but state resources may not. As more Centers come on-line, will existing provider networks be willing and able to provide increased services and levels of care? If service providers do not have sufficient resources to meet the increased demands, would the General Assembly or the CHR allocate additional resources to health and human services for children and families?

The answers to these questions depend on how successful the Interagency Task Force and local Advisory Councils and Centers are in building and sustaining cooperatively relationships among providers in their communities, and in developing an effective statewide advocacy coalition. The intensity and political clout of competing claimants for limited state resources, as well as the strength of the future state economy also might constrain the future of the program.

Focus Groups, July 1992

Steve Kay, Rona Roberts, Roberts and Kay, Inc.

Purposes

To develop greater understanding of Kentuckians' beliefs, attitudes and values about education reform.

To develop research-based information for creation and implementation of community initiatives.

Conducted

The focus groups were conducted by Roberts and Kay, Inc., a research and organizational communications firm based in Lexington, KY, during May 1992.

Sample

Participants were randomly recruited by The Matrix Group, a market research firm in Lexington, KY.

Format

A total of 70 participants.

Three kinds of participant groups: general public; teachers; business people.

A facilitator led each group, asking participants:

- their impressions of the their local schools;
- their sources of information on education;
- their familiarity and opinions about education reform;
- their responses to statements about Kentucky education; and
- how they ranked education in comparison with other important issues.

Number

Seven

Locations

Bowling Green	(teachers)
Elizabethtown	(citizens)
Ft. Mitchell	(business)
Madisonville	(business)
Prestonsburg	(citizens)
Somerset	(two groups: citizens; teachers)

Sponsors

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform.

Implications of Research Findings on 1992 Focus Groups

- Where Kentuckians have experience with implemented reforms that reflect the intent of the legislation, responses are positive, even enthusiastic.
- Kentuckians value education highly.
- Kentuckians recognize that their schools as a whole need massive improvements.
- Even opponents of reform have recognized it as a force with staying power.
- Many owners and managers of small businesses are inclined to support reform.
- Some elements of reform—those not aimed directly in classroom practices—are based on philosophies that are both transparent and appealing to Kentuckians.
- No major concern is brewing over the taxes that support reform.
- Reform is an orphan—neither citizens, business people, nor even teachers assume responsibility for it.
- Although both citizens and education policy makers agree schools need changing, they do not share a vision of appropriate education practices.
- Citizens do not support reform as enthusiastically as do education policy makers and advocates.
- Citizens and teachers differ from education experts in their expectations of change in schools.
- Citizens and teachers have differing views about the role each plays in educating children; these differences complicate the process of building ownership of reform.
- Through both past and present practices, schools and communities have separated themselves from each other.
- Most Kentuckians associate reform with politicians and most Kentuckians share the national disillusionment with politicians.
- Kentucky citizens and teachers are quick to form negative judgments about reform.
- A sizeable number of Kentuckians have already formed negative opinions about some key elements of reform.
- Teachers are essential to the success of reform, but at present they are not ideal spokespeople for it.
- Teachers need more information and support.